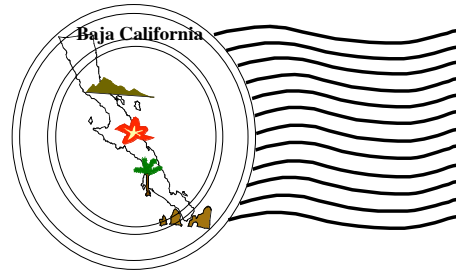


HOLA AMIGOS!

My name is Salvador, and I'll be telling you all about the section of Mexico called Baja California. I was born in Baja California and have lived here all my life. I have been up and down this peninsula many times, so I think I can be of much assistance! My family owns a small hotel in Loreto, a town of over 10,000 people located in north-central Baja California.



Baja is a long and narrow peninsula that is 1,288 km (800 miles) long. It is bordered on the north by the U.S. state of California and is separated from the rest of Mexico by the Sea of Cortez to the east. It is bordered by the Pacific Ocean to the west.

I hope you've had a chance to look at the map of the area. If you haven't, please take a quick look now! Baja California is very different from other landforms you might be familiar with. For one, it looks like it is detaching itself from the rest of Mexico. Some people call it a heel that is breaking off from a woman's shoe. I think it looks more like a broken tree branch that's hanging by a thread!

Lucas is at the southern tip of Baja California and is a very popular tourist attraction with its many lagoons and beaches.

Since my aunt and uncle live in San Diego, California, we travel up through Baja California to visit them every year. San Diego is minutes away from the US-Mexico divide, which is the northern border of Baja California. I also have a sister, Isabel, who just got married and now lives in Cabo San Lucas. Cabo San

The way Baja California looks today is the result of many different geologic processes occurring at different times in history. This would be clear to you if you could see all of the different mountain types on the peninsula. Barren and rugged mountains, represented by the Sierra de la Victoria and the Sierra de la Laguna mountain ranges, are in the south. These mountains are much steeper than the major ranges found in the north, such as the Sierra Juarez and Sierra San Pedro, which slope gently towards the Pacific coast. There are also mountainous islands off the coast of Baja, such as the Cedros Island Mountains.



The road leads through an interesting landscape, which changes on the way to the Pacific coast from desert-like to fertile plains and mountain range.

http://www.reiseagentur.de/Travelogs/95_96/html/017g.html

Our mountains are not overwhelmingly tall, and they cover only about a quarter of the land. Otherwise, the area is made up of a lot of flat desert. Mountain climbers looking to conquer

really challenging heights would be a little disappointed by the mountains we offer here. They pale in comparison to the world's taller mountains and are not as jagged and rough as other major global chains. In fact, the highest peak on Baja California is Cerro de la Encantada in northern Baja. It is more than 12,880 m (8,000 ft) above sea level. As far as mountains go, that isn't very high.



The dormant volcano, "Las Tres Virgenes" (The Three Virgins), towers over the landscape. It reportedly erupted in the early 1800's and is surrounded by recent lava flows. The rich volcanic soil around the volcano grows majestic elephant trees, like the one in the foreground.

<http://www.costacardonal.com/ccPhoto64.html>

If you're looking for volcanoes, you'll only find a few active volcanoes in the area around my hometown. One is Tres Virgenes Volcano (which means "Three Virgins"), located in central Baja, not too far from Loreto. It is 1,940 m (6,365 ft) above sea level and has not erupted since the late 1700's. I also hear that there is some volcanic activity under the water here, though I haven't seen it.

Be aware of other natural hazards such as earthquakes, which happen on the Baja peninsula all the time. Most of Baja's earthquakes happen underwater in the middle of the Sea of Cortez. I know you're probably confused – most people don't understand how an earthquake can be underwater. Maybe this is something you could research!

If you were ever to visit this area, you'd have to bring plenty of bottled water. Northern Baja is extremely hot and dry, dominated by nearly 1,550 square km of desert. To give you an idea of how dry it is down here, my hometown of Loreto didn't receive a single drop of rain all last year!

However, even these deserts are rich and valuable because they are full of strange forms of cacti and other rare plant life. Some people even call Baja California a botanist's paradise since it contains so many rare plant species.

But not all of Baja is full of inhospitable desert. If you head down towards my sister's house in Cabo San Lucas, you'll see that southern Baja receives a bit of rainfall. In fact, the lowlands of southern Baja California are used to grow crops such as cotton, sugar cane, and olives. Some of the southern mountains also have forests that are used for the local economy.

I think that's all you need to know for now. You won't experience the best of Baja California until you actually get here. Think about visiting! Think about all that good Mexican food you'd get to eat if you did visit! Fish tacos and big bean burritos... I'm getting hungry just thinking about them! It's time for dinner – I hope you have fun learning about Baja.

Your friend,
Salvador Cabrera
28°N 113°W